The Miser of Bagdad

THERE was once an old merchant of Bagdad, named Abou Casen, who was famous for his avarice. Although he was very rich, all the clothes he wore were patched and mended in many places, and his turban, made of coarse linen, was so greasy and dirty that it was impossible to tell what its original color had been.

But the most surprising part of his costume, the things that deserved to be the most noticed, were his slippers. The soles were studded with large nails, the upper leather consisted of a number of small pieces joined together, and for the ten years that they had existed as slippers the most ingenious cobblers of Bagdad had spent time and skill in making the poor remnants hold together. They had, therefore, become so heavy that they grew into a proverb, and whenever people wished to give an idea of great weight, the slipper of Casen were brought forward as a comparison.

It happened one day, when Casen was passing through the public market of the city, the purchase of a large amount of crystal was proposed to him, and he at once closed with it. Some days after, having heard that a ruined perfumer's last hope lay in the sale of a quantity of rose water, he took advantage of the poor man's misfortune and bought the rose water at half its value.

These profitable transactions having put him into a good humor, he thought it better, instead of giving a feast (as is the custom of eastern merchants), to go to the bath, where he had not been for a long time.

"THESE SLIPPERS HAVE REDUCED ME TO BEGGARY."

While he was undressing one of his acquaintances told him his slippers rendered him the talk of the whole city and that he himself would, in the end, be obliged to give him another pair.

"It is quite time that I should think about it," answered Casen, "but after all they are not so worn that they cannot still serve my purpose," and so saying he finished undressing and entered the bath.

While he was washing himself the cadi of Bagdad also came there to bathe. Then Casen, having made an end of his ablutions, returned to the first room and put on his garments, but vainly did he seek for his slippers. Instead of their being where he had left them they had got pushed away into some corner, and in their place lay a pair of new ones.

Whereupon our miser, quite believing that this was, what he would have wished it to be, a gift from the person who had just been admonishing him, put them on without more ado, and, nearly beside himself with joy at being spared the expense of buying others, he left the bath.

When the cadi had finished bathing his slaves sought everywhere for their master's slippers, but in vain. They only succeeded in finding some filthy ones, which were at once recognized as Casen's. The doorkeepers immediately ran after Casen and he being deemed a thief, was taken as such, was led back to the cadi and for this exchange of slippers sent to prison.

In order to escape out of the claws of justice he was obliged to open his purse pretty widely, and as he was held to be as rich a man as he was a miserly one you can easily believe he did not get off very cheaply. The sorely afflicted Casen on reaching home took his slippers and flung them in a rage into the Tigris, which flowed beneath his windows.

Some days after, when certain fishermen were drawing up a net, they found it heavier than usual, and, lo, Casen's slippers were in it and, moreover, had torn the meshes of the net with the nails that decked the soles. The fishermen, furious both with the miser and his slippers, thought to throw them back to him by his open window. And, being thrown by a vigorous arm, the slippers fell back among the vials of rose water ranged along his shelves, so that the vials were all broken, and the miser's recently purchased rose water was lost.

"Oh, most fatal slippers!" said he, "Ye shall do me no more harm," and he took a spade and dug a hole in his garden, intending to bury them forever.

Now, one of his neighbors, who for a very long time had borne him a grudge, saw him doing this and immediately ran to the cadi to tell him that Casen had dug up a treasure in his garden. It needed nothing more to inflame the cadi's covetousness, and the miser might say as much as he liked that he had not found anything, but had only meant to bury his slippers—it was no good. The cadi had already counted on taking off a good handful of gold, and the unhappy Casen only obtained his liberty by the expenditure of a large sum of money.

Our miserly friend, rendered desperate, cursing the slippers with all his might, went and flung them into an aqueduct a good distance from the town. This time, at least, he believed he was certain to hear nothing more of them.

But it was not to be so. The slippers lodged in the pipe, thus preventing the free passage of the water. The superintendent of the aqueduct hastened to search into the matter, and, finding Casen's slippers, he brought them to the governor, saying the miser had caused all the mischief. The unlucky owner of the old slippers was again put in prison and fined more heavily than before.

The cadi, after justice had been done, scrupulously returned him his precious property. Then Casen, in order once for all to free himself from the disasters they had brought on him, determined to burn them, and as they were thoroughly soaked through he exposed them to the rays of the sun on the terrace of his house so that they might dry.

Fortune, however, had not yet ended all the injuries she wished to inflict on him, but had kept the most cruel for the last.

A dog owned by some one living in the neighborhood caught sight of them, rushed down the master's house to the place where they lay, snatched up one in his mouth and while playing with it let it fall right on the head of a stout woman who was going by. In consequence of the fright and blow the woman fell ill, the husband complained to the cadi, and Casen was condemned to pay a heavy fine for the harm done.

Thereupon Casen went away, and soon, carrying the slippers in his hand, he came again before the cadi.

"Here," said he, with a fury that made the judges laugh, "here is the fatal origin of all my troubles. These slippers have reduced me to beggary. I entreat you to have the goodness to pass an edict so that the evils these ill omened things will certainly continue to cause may no longer be imputed to me."

The cadi could not refuse, and an edict was passed, but, as you have seen, only when Casen had learned at an enormous expense how great is the danger of wearing one pair of slippers too long.—Philadelphia Press.

A Riddle.

Ten men's length,
Ten men's strength,
Ten men can't tear it,
But a baby can carry it.
(Answer—A rope.)

Three Old Maids and a Widow

By C. B. LEWIS

There are few towns of 1,500 population that can boast of three old maids and a widow living on the same street, but that was the case with Clifton. Miss Vinton was an old maid because she never had met with a man good enough for her. Miss Hopkins was an old maid because the young man she would have married at eighteen was sawed in two in a sawmill and she had vowed to be true to his memory. Miss Warner was an old maid because she was determined to marry none but a minister, and all the ministers who came were already provided for. The Widow Carter was a widow because part of a house had fallen on her husband.

The old maids and the widow were on visiting terms—in fact, they rather liked each other. Where there are no male candidates for matrimony concerned old maids and widows can sit down together on the same veranda without quarreling. After the widow had solemnly assured the old maids that nothing on the face of this earth could induce her to be false to the memory of her crushed, the quartet loved each other even more.

One day one of the merchants in the town sold out and a stranger came to take his place. If he had been a married man the dove of peace would have continued to hover over Rose street, but as he was single, only thirty and a "catch" the dove saw a hot time ahead.

The widow let no grass grow under her feet in calling at the store and incidentally mentioning her name and ordering four pounds of sugar all at once. She was one of the Four Hundred of the town, and on the part of the other 399 she bade Mr. Strong welcome to their midst. When he had thanked her she ordered two nutmegs and a paper of starch, in addition to the sugar, to let him understand that she wasn't obliged to pinch pennies, and then departed.

An hour later her reprehensible conduct was known to the three old maids, and up went three pairs of hands; six eyes were turned upward in horror and three mouths opened to exclaim in chorus, "How shocking!"

Then, during the next two days, each of the old maids made an excuse to call at the store and follow the programme carried out by the widow. Each thought she was sly and slick, but they found each other out, and from that moment the bond of friendship snapped asunder like an old clothesline left out in the storms of a year.

When women make war on each other they don't use fence rails to pound each other on the head. In most cases they go right on treating each other as nicely as they can to their faces, but using daggers and the darkness to assassinate. The three old maids and the widow gathered together as of yore, but the dagger was used whenever there was the least show.

Mr. Strong proved a social success. The widow gave a little dinner and brought him out, but the old maids really monopolized him for the evening. Then Miss Warner gave an exhibition of her own paintings, which consisted of a cow apparently thirty-six feet long and of a river running up stream instead of down, and the widow held Mr. Strong's attention for an hour while she talked about her crushed and departed.

At the end of six weeks the man who ran the sawmill and had a mortgage on the mill dam figured it out to his wife:

"There are three old maids to one widow, but if the widow gets left she'll be the first one I ever heard of."

Even the small boys around town noticed how girly the old maids were becoming. They giggled, they uttered cute little screams when they turned a corner and found themselves face to face with a cow, they tittered when they asked for gum drops at the grocery. As for the widow, she set her jaw and walked into the store two or three times a week to ask the merchant if he thought the Seventy-seventh National bank of Boston was perfectly sound and to sigh with relief when he assured her of his confidence in the institution. Sly reports were soon afloat that Mr. Strong was paying his attentions to this or that one of the four. Then the other three would reply as one:

"Well, may be he is, but what on earth he can see in her is more than I can make out. She grows more homely and dowdified every day. Of course I'm telling you this in confidence, and, of course, it won't go further."

One fatal evening tragedy after tragedy happened, and the light went out of several happy households. Mr. Strong boarded with a family living half a mile from the store. He wanted the walk. He had to cross the bridge over the river and ascend a hill covered with woods, and there wasn't a house between his boarding place and the town.

The three old maids and the widow had had their eyes on this road from the first. They had soon begun walking for exercise. They didn't walk at the hours the merchant might be expected, and if they encountered each other they made all manner of excuses, but each one understood what the other was at and determined to baffle her in the end.

Mr. Strong had been given three months in which to declare his attentions, and he hadn't declared. Time was too valuable to be wasted. His habit was to return to his store after a 6 o'clock supper and remain there until 8. Just before 8 o'clock, then, on this awful night four human figures might have been seen stealing out of the town and over the bridge.

Each and every one of them would have paused on the bridge to listen to the musical plash of the river if they hadn't seen each other. The first, second and third were obliged to go on to avoid the last one. She was the widow. She knew the value of a bridge and a river and a musical plash, and she determined to stick.

One old tramp and a dog were responsible for most of what followed. The tramp came humping along through the town, bent on finding a country strawstack as soon as possible, and as the widow on the bridge heard his footsteps she began to look artless and coy.

It was labor thrown away. The tramp was nearsighted and bumped up against her, and in her fright she went over the low railing and down into the water. If she couldn't swim like a duck she could at least scramble like a cat, and she managed to get ashore. Her condition was dripping, also drooping, also indignant. She realized that no dripping, drooping woman stood the slightest show in that contest, and she dragged herself homeward and was not improved in looks or temper by having to wade through a couple of mud puddles.

Miss Vinton came next. She was sauntering up the hill wondering how "that widow" dared be so bold and brassy when the tramp, who was now on the run for his life, overtook her. In his nearsightedness he took her for a horse and wagon and tried to shy out. She shied to the right at the same time and was sent sprawling by the collision. She got out of the roadside ditch to run into a patch of briers and scream for help, but there was no help. She had to extricate herself and follow the bedraggled widow.

The dog alone was responsible for what happened to the other two old maids. Miss Warner had discovered one woman ahead and two behind her, and, suspecting their fiendish intentions, she had almost made up her mind to abandon her object when the dog, who had been calling on his brother out in the country, came along and set up a barking and growling. Tragedy was the result. The old maid never had encountered a big bobtailed dog at night on a hill, and she at once scrambled over the fence into the weeds and ran for her life. She fell down and rolled over, and she rose up again and struggled on, and when she reached home two hours later she immediately went into hysterics, and Dr. Seaton got his first night call for fourteen years.

The dog had met with such success that he was encouraged to persevere. He came upon Miss Hopkins out of the shadows like a frisking haystack, and as she screamed out and spread her wings to fly she tripped and went down. The fall might have injured her but for the fact that she fell upon soft mud. She couldn't go back to town looking like the mortar mixer for a skyscraper, and she continued on to the merchant's boarding house to get the use of hoes and scrapers. They were furnished, but while she was using them she heard the ten-year-old daughter whispering to her mother that she'd bet a cent that Miss Hopkins had come out there to giggle for Mr. Strong.

That was an awful night in Clifton, though only four feminine hearts knew just how awful it was. Morning dawned with a murky sky overhead. It seemed to three old maids and a widow as if something more was still to happen. They were right. When the butcher boy called for his orders he repeated the same words at every house on his route:

"Say, you heard the news? Mr. Strong has gone to Phillipsville to git married today, and he's goin' to bring the bride home tonight. Hain't it great?"

The Human Wall in the Bell.

Tradition has a weird tale to tell about the casting of the bell which stands in the center of Seoul, the capital of Korea. The mystery of its sonorous clang still inspires the inhabitants with awe and pity. When the bell was first cast it was found to be cracked. It was thrown into the smelting pot and cast a second time, with no better result. The artificers proceeded to recast it a third time, and while they were on the point of completing their task a woman walked up to the furnace with a child and cried, "Twice have ye failed, and thrice will ye fail if there be no blood in it!" With these words she snatched up her child and threw it into the molten mass. The bell, when cast, was found to be without a flaw, and to this day the people aver that the tone of the bell as it peals forth is the piteous wail of the child, "Mother, mother, oh, mother!" The legend, it would appear, finds a counterpart in the different countries of the far east, as do so many in the western world.

The Social Sea Gull.

Gulls love society. They always nest in colonies and live together the entire year. They are most useful birds about the water fronts of our cities. These gulls have developed certain traits that mark them as land birds rather than birds of the sea. In southern California and Oregon I have watched flocks of them leave the ocean and rivers at daybreak every morning and sail inland for miles, skirmishing about the country to pick up a living in the fields, following the plow all day long, as blackbirds do, and fighting at the farmer's heels for angleworms. I have seen others rummage daily about pigpens and gorge on the offal thrown out from the slaughter houses. If any bird is useful to man, the gull is certainly of great economic importance as a scavenger.—American Magazine.

A French Verdict.

All juries have a way of tempering justice with mercy and strict logic with good or bad sense. French juries excel in these practices. A Mme. Canaby of Bordeaux was accused of having forged two prescriptions and of having thereby obtained large quantities of poison, some of which she administered to her husband, who nearly died and was only saved by his doctor, who suspected something wrong and took him away. The evidence was overwhelming, for the prisoner completely failed to give any plausible explanation as to why she wanted the poison enough, as the chemist said, to kill two regiments. Nevertheless the jury found Mme. Canaby guilty of forging the prescriptions, but not guilty of attempting to poison her husband. Perhaps the jury thought the husband unpoisoned was punishment enough in himself for one crime.

Chinese Dialects.

"It is absolutely impossible," writes a traveler recently returned from a tour of China, "to conceive of a nation speaking as many dialects as you will find in China. A foreigner's ability to speak Chinese is a practically worthless acquirement, as about every twenty-five miles the dialect changes to such an extent as to be practically another language, and even if you are speaking the best mandarin—the court language—you are quite apt to be told that your honorable foreign language is not understood. Even the governors of the provinces have to employ interpreters to communicate with the people they govern.

"It is a common joke among foreigners in China that the natives always indicate by signs what they intend to converse about before beginning to talk, and this is a joke with quite a grain of truth in it."—Harper's Weekly.